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NSC BRIEFING

7 March 1956

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MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

I. Flare-up of violence along Israeli border (4 to 7 March) illustrates tenseness now prevailing between Arab states and Israel.

A. On 4 March, an apparent Israeli reconnaissance operation on eastern shore of Lake Tiberias was blocked by Syrians, who seized stranded Israeli boat, killed three and captured one of crew.

1. Israeli foreign office has warned of "counter-action" if captive not returned.

B. On 5 March, Syrian ground-fire crippled Israeli light plane (also probably on reconnaissance mission) near northern border.

1. Israelis claim plane was fired on while over its own territory.

State Department review completed

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C. On 5 March, patrol clash took place

along Israeli-Egyptian frontier.

D. On 7 March, Egyptian and Israeli positions in Gaza strip exchanged fire.

E. Same day, Israel protested to UN Security Council over Syria's "wanton acts of aggression".

II. Cause of present extreme tension is combination of Arab troop concentrations near Israeli frontiers and simultaneous Israeli force build-up (see map). Three most important of Arabs are:

A. Egypt--now has 42,500 men (over half total army and estimated 80% of combat strength) in Sinai peninsula.

1. Units in Sinai include ^{OVER 220} tanks

(with possibly 85 Soviet T-34 medium tanks in reserve).

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B. Jordan--its 22,000-man Arab Legion

remains normally disposed at present (two brigades across river in West Jordan, three east of river), and its National Guard (21,600 men) is generally deployed along 400-mile frontier with Israel.

C. Syria--now has practically all its forces (total: 39,200) on front aimed at Banat Yacov, where they believe Israelis will divert water from Jordan River.

D. As for other three, main elements of small (17,000) Saudi army remains in two concentrations: in and near the capital (Riyad) and in the Hejaz (1,800 of latter near Jordan frontier) Saudis would find it difficult to bring forces to bear on Israel.

E. Although Lebanon has moved some units of its tiny 6,600 force into frontier positions, whole-hearted action by Lebanon is doubtful.

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F. Although Iraq (53,000 men) has felt

impelled to give public and private assurances of aid to other Arabs should Palestine war develop, combination of British influence and Baghdad pact considerations, as well as Iraq's 200-mile removal from Israel, would probably reduce effectiveness of its participation.

G. Israel also continuing gradual mobilization.

1. Now estimated they have between 85,000 and 100,000 men on active duty, in three major commands (north, central and south).

III. Despite these ominous developments, still no evidence that either Arabs or Israelis have taken decision to initiate full-scale war.

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A. Great and immediate danger remains,

however, that further border incidents could expand into full-scale war despite current desire of both sides to avoid it.

B. At moment, this danger most acute on Syrian frontier.

C. Further danger is that Israelis might be goaded--both by internal and external considerations--into "preventive war".

IV. New factor in present Arab boldness is their belief that USSR stands ready to support them, both diplomatically and with continuing sales of arms.

A. This belief encouraged by Moscow statements (most recent: 13 Feb) which denounce as "imperialism" both Western attempts to bring about Palestine settlement and possible

Western plans to intervene in event of fighting.

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NSC BRIEFING [REDACTED] 7 MARCH 1956
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BACKGROUND
MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

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- I. Arab Legion (22,000) is composed of 3 infantry brigades, and one mechanized brigade. An artillery brigade supports the other four brigades.
- II. British officers relieved 1 March from Jordan Arab Legion.

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IV. Present line-up in Arab Legion Headquarters.

A. Top headquarters position taken over
by Arabs:

Commanding General

Deputy CGS and Asst. Security

Chief Counter Intelligence

Asst. CS Operations

Asst. CS Administration

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- B. All four brigades may be under Jordanian command in ten months even if British complete tours.
- C. No Bedouin units now commanded by Britishers.

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D. Most units affected now without effective leadership. Morale and effectiveness certain to suffer. Fact that 3 out of 4 top officers in Legion Headquarters posts have police background and experience rather than military "bodes ill for top command."

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VI. Future status of British.

A. King Hussain says British Officers will undertake jobs as experts and instructors.

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C. British Foreign Office and War Office have decided that no requests for relief from the legion will be accepted; at

present British officials feel
officers should finish their normal
tour.

D. No More British replacements will
come.

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BACKGROUND--GRUENTHER REPORT

I. French are committed to maintain 7 divisions in readiness as their contribution to NATO "cover" forces. Of these seven, only five are actually available:

A. Four are on garrison duty in Germany (five should be, but one already in N. Africa).

B. One is in eastern France (two should be, but one already in N. Africa).

C. Both these divisions moved since last summer.

II. Five remaining "cover" divisions, in turn, have been nibbled down since last summer to provide units for North Africa, and bigger bites are planned through March '56. Gruenther report summarizes past and planned transfers

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A. In Germany:

1st Armored Div. will lose 3
battalions.

5th Armored Div. will lose 1
battalion.

3rd Div. will lose 1 regiment of
infantry.

4th Motorized Div.-- already in
North Africa.

7th Mechanized Div. will lose
replacements and suffer reductions.

B. In France, the level of "M-Day"
forces has been (or will be) affected
thus:

6th Armored Div. will lose 4
battalions.

2nd Motorized Div.--already in
North Africa.

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C. Effect on French Army units in

France with NATO "M-Day Plus" assignments is as follows (percentages include recruits in training):

8th Div. now has 7 of total 9 battalions in North Africa.

15th Div. (at 30% war strength) will lose one-third of its trained manpower.

25th Div. (at 55% of war strength) now has about one-half of trained manpower in North Africa.

19th and 27th Divs. have been activated and sent to North Africa.

29th Div. (at 15% of war strength) has "considerable portion" of trained men in North Africa.

III. Thus French NATO ready forces are reduced from 7 to 4 divisions.

A. Further, the mobilization base of

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entire French army is severely under-
mined

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IV. Ambassador Dillon points out that French

troop shifts have increasingly disregarded spirit and letter of North Atlantic Council resolution concerning authority of NATO command over NATO-assigned forces.

- A. First moves of last summer accompanied by French request for SACEUR consent.
- B. Later moves, in Autumn, accompanied by advance French statement to SACEUR that shifts matter of "necessity".
- C. But SACEUR merely informed of moves scheduled during March '56 as "fait accompli", with no request for consent or clearance.

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7 MARCH 1956

BACKGROUND
ARAB/ISRAELI ORDER OF BATTLE

I. Egypt

(76,000)

--Ground: Approximately half of total ~~forces~~^{forces}
concentrated in Sinai. Two ~~inf~~
inf divs support 8 National
Guard and 3 Palestine Home Guard
battalions in border areas; armor
concentrated farther west.

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II. Jordan

--Ground: Backing up National Guard on
Israel border, the Arab Legion
remains in normal deployment with
two infantry brigades west of

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brigade plus armored and artillery

brigades east of river between
Amman and Syrian border.

--Air : Jordan's airforce has only 10
jet fighters (obsolete Vampires).

III. Saudi Arabia

--Ground: Small Saudi forces, about 1,800,
are concentrated at Tebuk, near
Jordan border.

--Air : Except for 6 B-26 attack bombers,
Saudis have no air force at
present.

IV. Syria

--Ground: Virtually entire Syrian field
force, including 6 infantry
brigades and nation's only
mechanized brigade, now concen-
trated in "front command" near
Israeli frontier.

--Air : None of Syria's 17 jet fighters
(obsolete Meteors) are

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operational.

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V. Lebanon

- Ground: Four infantry battalions with supporting artillery now on Israeli border.
- Air : Lebanese air force has only 6 jet fighters (obsolete Vampires).

VI. Iraq

- Ground: Iraqi forces are not deployed so as to move rapidly against Israel.
- Air : Iraqi airforce has 21 jet fighters (obsolete Vampires & Venoms).

VII. Israel

- Ground: Forces deployed in 3 regional commands, with bulk of armor in south opposite Egyptians. Israel can mobilize fully within 48 hours increasing from current strength to 200,000
- Air : Israeli airforce has 49 jet fighters (obsolete Meteors and Ouragans).

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FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

- I. In week since Council last briefed on Algerian crisis, few actual developments on scene. Focus instead on France itself.
 - A. Nothing but silence from Algerian nationalists in response to Premier Mollet's 28 Feb "lay down your arms or else" ultimatum.
 - B. Somewhat improved French military successes against rebels.
 1. Some 160 rebels killed, "several hundred" captured since last Thursday, while French army lost 13 killed, 7 wounded.
 - C. Nonetheless, French continue extremely apprehensive: Mollet says he expects greatly increased violence in Algeria by late March or early April.

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D. Gen. Valluy (French rep. NATO Stand-

ing Group) says "anarchy can occur
in Algeria in matter of weeks or
even days".

II. Mollet's proposed policy of strength in
Algeria not yet settled issue in France.

- A. Assembly debate on his request for
special powers now scheduled for
8-9 March, and Government's supporters
already split.
- B. Many Socialists shocked by Mollet's
ultimatum to rebels: Popular
Republicans' spokesman has said his
party cannot condone such policy.
- C. Embassy Paris reports widespread
feeling in France that Algerian
problem is most serious one faced by
Assembly since World War II.
- D. Some even fear that Fourth Republic
itself cannot survive shock of either
loss of Algeria or slaughter of

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French settlers there.

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III. Question of how French can implement

Mollet Government's decision of firmness,
if approved, still up in air.

A. Gen. Valluy estimates total of

500,000 men needed to pacify Algeria

(now nearly 200,000 there). *150,000*
in balance 70 Molt - 60 Tunis

1. However, Valluy says time

probably not available to give
such large forces the special
guerrilla training necessary.

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C. Yet Gen. Gruenther reports that French
troop shifts to North Africa since
last summer and planned shifts this

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month already reduce NATO strength

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by the equivalent of three M-Day

divisions, and severely undermine
the French Army's wartime mobiliza-
tion base.

IV. US interests involved in other respects,
as well.

- A. Strong-arm approach in Algeria would
also have side-effects in Morocco
(where US has air-base interests).
- B. Regardless of French stand that
Algeria is indivisible part of
metropolitan France, policy of force
there will raise charges of bloody
colonialism throughout Arab world,
provide Soviet Bloc with further
ammunition for its influence drive.
- C. French-US relations also being
damaged.
 - 1. French charging US with encourage-
ment of nationalists.

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1. Immediate celebrations held in

principal Moroccan cities to
acclaim "independence."

2. Sultan--who returned to Rabat
on 5 March--expected by Paris to
issue strong call for tribal
cease-fire.

B. New French negotiations with
Tunisians opened in Paris 29 Feb.

1. Tunisians want national army,
diplomatic representation.
2. General elections on 25 March--
first ever held in Tunisia--will
select constituent assembly (to
convene 8 April, draft Tunisian
constitution).
3. Considerable agitation and pre-
election maneuvering probable,
but large-scale disturbances
unlikely.

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2. Pressing us to back their

"policy", on grounds that USSR is "outflanking" NATO through support for Arabs, who, in turn, are supporting North African nationalists.

3. French officials nonetheless unable to spell out "policy" they want US to back: both Mollet and Pineau have asked only for joint statement backing "French presence" in area.

V. Elsewhere in French North Africa, some net improvement visible.

A. Although 2 March declaration by French and Moroccan governments merely suspends--rather than abrogates--"protectorate" treaty (Fez 1912), France has conceded Moroccan participation in foreign affairs, defense and internal

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Security. -5-

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B. Arab belief also encouraged by actual

Soviet Bloc arms deliveries to
Egypt and Syria, as well as con-
clusion of additional arms contracts.

V. First major phase of Bloc arms deliveries
to Egypt now appears at end.

A. Totals: probably 70-80 MIG-15's,
30-45 IL-28 jet light bombers,
100-150 T-34 (medium) tanks, [REDACTED]

ILLEGIB

20-40 JS-3 (heavy) tanks, 11 torpedo boats.

B. These are the major items--much other
materiel, including artillery and
vehicles, also presumably delivered.

C. Bloc also starting delivery of arms
to Syria, under contracts which may
amount to as much as \$22 million
(see Syria background).

VI. Rise in Soviet influence among Arabs
being matched by decline in position of
UK in area. In UK-created Hashemite
Kingdom of Jordan, King Hussein's dis-
missal of Gen. Glubb (and destruction of

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latest symptom this continuing decline.

A. London lost ground in Dec '55 when

tried unsuccessfully get Jordan to
join Baghdad Pact (maneuver designed
to balance growing influence Egypt,
Saudi Arabia).

B. Potential UK military leverage from
bases in area also declining

1. Evacuation of Suez base now far
advanced.

2. Usefulness of Cyprus staging-base
likely to decline further, with
increasing political strife
following collapse of latest
Cyprus negotiations.

3. British garrison in Libya (at
Idris) to be increased from
brigade to armored division, but
Foreign Office anticipates
increasing political problems
there.

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4. British air-base rights in

Jordan and Iraq of little use
in influencing local political
developments.

VII. British consider retention of UK Middle
East position absolutely essential--
mainly because of oil.

A. They maintain ME oil is vital to UK
home economy.

B. ^{60%}~~Most~~ of UK's own annual consumption
(28 million tons, worth some \$500
million) comes from ME fields.

1. UK expects domestic requirement
to treble within next 20 years.
2. Although they think atomic
energy may make up some 40% (or
more) of this requirement by end
of 20 years, remainder must still
come from oil.

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C. Aside from own consumption, British

petroleum investment in area is big business (valued at equivalent \$1.68 billion) and important earner of foreign currency.

D. Western Europe, as a whole, also similarly dependent on Middle East oil--75% of 1954's consumption.

E. No official US estimate on this question, but British view regarded as substantially correct--with qualification that oil discoveries elsewhere--e.g., in Mediterranean basin--could ease situation.

VIII. As to future of Jordan, UK head of Foreign Office (Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick) foresees its eventual partition between Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

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A. Expects that Arab Legion will

probably disintegrate, since most of its best regiments are Bedouins not in sympathy with officers close to King Hussein (see background).

B. In our own view, we see participation of Jordanian "Free Officers' Movement" in Glubb ouster as long-range threat to Hashemite throne as well.

1. Also consider deterioration of Legion inevitable.

2. Probable that Egyptian-Saudi subsidy will take place of annual \$22 million Jordan now receives from UK.

IX. As to Middle East in general, British are now likely to insist on strong US support for moves aimed at stabilization.

A. British think Baghdad Pact must now be strengthened, and will probably press for early US accession.

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B. Foreign Office states British now

prepared make every effort reach
immediate agreement on boundaries
with Saudi Arabia; want US help on
preventing Saudi violations.

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MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

- I. Communists making considerable headway in Southeast Asian campaign to demonstrate "advantages" of neutralism.
- II. Bloc aid toward solving Burma's surplus rice problem has convinced Burmese leaders of economic wisdom their long-held neutralist policies.
 - A. Bloc technological aid (in payment for rice) provides excellent means of infiltration.
 - B. Burmese government not unaware of this, and still wants Western assistance.
 - C. But good-will created by Bulganin-Khrushchev visit and rice deals is strong
- III. Since Peiping visit, Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk has become aggressive neutralist.
 - A. Professes to see Thailand, Philippines and South Vietnam as little more than US stooges.

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B. He is convinced that damaging embargo on Cambodian trade (imposed by President Diem) was prompted by US irritation over his neutralism.

C. On return from China, Sihanouk did observe, however, that while Communism might be good for China, "incredibly hard" work it demanded of the people was "not for Cambodians."

IV. In Laos, Premier Katay--seeking vote of confidence--has cited his prospective cabinet's approval of "five principles of peaceful coexistence."

A. His statement brought unprecedented friendly editorials in Chinese Communist press, obviously intended to stimulate Laotian Neutralism.

B. Katay may well accept invitation to visit Hanoi or Peiping.

C. Laotian leaders under strong pressure to find solution to Pathet Lao problem

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V. As to South Vietnam Communists--with no chance of neutralizing President Diem's regime and no prospect of all-Vietnam elections next July--are seeking a new approach to unification.

A. Chou En-lai's call for new conference on Indochina being echoed by Moscow.

B. Communists probably have in mind offering definite postponement of nationwide July elections in return for South Vietnam's neutralization.

VI. Thai leaders, after apparent reappraisal their anti-Communist policies, seem to have decided on no change for present.

A. Government equivocation--which allowed opposition MP and party to visit Peiping --promptly ended with MP's arrest upon return.

B. But relaxation of press controls last summer, lately reimposed, revealed considerable neutralist sentiment among

literate Thais.

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C. These elements point to fact that

neutral Burma and India--in contrast
to Thailand--get offers "from both
sides".

VII. Finally, the Malaysians are engrossed with
emerging independence (now promised by
August 1957, "if possible").

A. While some leaders have expressed favor-
able view of neutralism, question of
future foreign policy overshadowed by
current domestic concerns.

B. Future of Singapore is one of toughest
nute to crack.

1. Communist subversion is rife there
and local government is shaky;
there are no strong non-Communist
parties or leaders.

2. British hope alliance of Singapore
with more stable Federation of
Malaya can be worked out.

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3. But they apparently prepared to
revoke constitution (granted in
early '55) and re-impose direct
rule if necessary.

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